

HOWARD KIMELDORF INTERVIEWS FOR *REDS OR RACKETS*?
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MEYER BAYLIN OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

INTERVIEWEE: MEYER BAYLIN

INTERVIEWERS: HOWARD KIMELDORF

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[00:00:00] **HOWARD KIMELDORF:** Spell out your name for me so in case I have to ever cite you there's no problems.

[00:00:04] **MEYER BAYLIN:** M-E-Y-E-R. Last name is B-A-Y-L-I-N,

[00:00:10] **HOWARD:** And this is an interview in Mill Valley and the date today is 1/23/84. And let's see if we got this on.

So why don't you tell me how you got involved in the San Pedro Waterfront? Or any experiences leading up to that in the trade union movement.

[00:00:33] **MEYER:** Okay. I started out as being a member, in the Communist League about 1926. Well, I was going to school and I participated in the school, college activities. Especially around the question of anti-war activities. Then later on, the thing developed even further and I got out of school and came with—accepted as a member of the Communist Party. Well, now this is about 1928 or '29 and became active through the Communist Party in various activities. I worked at that time in electrician which was my major trade, as you call it, or the way of earning a living as working as an electrical worker. I did other things too, especially during the Depression.

[00:01:56] **HOWARD:** Excuse me, where were you located at this time?

[00:01:59] **MEYER:** In Los Angeles [California] . In Los Angeles and up and from 1928 and on. I was located in Los Angeles. I became an organizer—or was selected as an organizer for the Trade Union Unity League. This was a national organization controlled and directed by the Communist Party. Can we stop for just a second?

During the period of the '20s, there was a drive within the official AFL [American Federal of Labor] to eliminate communists and socialists from the organization and were expelled. Fairly large numbers. Maybe 2,000, 3,000 workers were expelled. There was not fight against it, as far as I can recall. So through the Communist Party, an organization was formed called the Trade Union Education League. William C. Foster as the head of it. And Foster was the major trade unionist of the communist movement, having been a member of the IWW at one time, the Socialist party, later the leader of the 1919 struggle to organize the steelworkers. He was one of the major leaders of that. So he became the leader of the time as a major trade union theoretician for the Communist Party. And he was the one that pushed the need to organize his TUEL, which was of course looked upon by other leaders and workers as a dual organization with the AFL and which was fought by the AFL, dual-unionism.

Later the name was changed from the Educational League—which implied not a union—to the Trade Union Unity League. And then regular locals were being formed. In Los Angeles, I helped formed a machinist local and cultural union, but nothing was done in reference to the longshoremen. If you're interested we had no contacts and no abilities, but we did develop quite a bit of activity in the seamen's union through the Marine Workers Industrial League—was the name of it. And the seamen had fairly close contact with the longshoremen naturally, working on the same ships and the seamen were very, in my opinion, very instrumental in encouraging the organization of the—what later became the ILWU. And so far as Harry Bridges himself had shipped out at one time, and was familiar with it, that is seamen and longshoremen. Now, when the struggle went on in the Los Angeles area, it was through mostly to the seamen who came to meetings to Los Angeles from Bloomington [California] , San Pedro to Long Beach [California] and who were given a lot of support by the Communist Party membership and also by others.

[00:05:55] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a few questions from this period before we move on. So the MWIU [Marine Workers Industrial Union] was active in Pedro?

[00:06:02] **MEYER:** Yes.

[00:06:02] **HOWARD:** How many organizers do you they were working—MWIU organizers? And how many—

[00:06:07] **MEYER:** Nationally?

[00:06:08] **HOWARD:** Well, in Pedro.

[00:06:10] **MEYER:** Well, I would say no more than about three. Officially, as organizers.

[00:06:14] **HOWARD:** Okay, about three of them?

[00:06:16] **MEYER:** Yeah.

[00:06:17] **HOWARD:** All right. And how many supporters did you have among the seamen, generally?

[00:06:22] **MEYER:** Well, one has to be careful in judging it because we tend to exaggerate our strength, but I would say about meetings of 25 to 50 were quite often held. And one has to understand that seamen were moving around and they're coming in and going, so you had a lot of turnover. But the Marine Workers Industrial Union received a lot of attention, mainly because conditions were so bad and they were working for as low as 30 to 40 dollars a month. And working fairly long hours.

[00:07:05] **HOWARD:** Do you remember the preamble of the MWIU? It's very revolutionary. It talks about the need not to just build to unions, but to build revolutionary organizations to overthrow capitalism.

[00:07:14] **MEYER:** No, I haven't seen it.

[00:07:16] **HOWARD:** Was that much of a factor in attracting seamen—?

[00:07:17] **MEYER:** Yes. Yes, it was because the Marine Workers Industrial Union did not hide any of its names, it was pretty open. It wasn't just a pork chop organization just to better conditions [reference to unions which only focus on immediate workers' conditions] . But it was the problem of even getting jobs which was very important. And there was certain fraternity developed among them so that they looked out for each other, which I thought was very good because they were always under the pressure of the state, as well as existing SIU, the seamen's union, which was called a fink union.

My connection with it is such that I have to be careful about giving you propaganda or facts. Okay, because you have to understand we were very, very dedicated and looked upon it. But, at times we underestimated what was going on because we didn't see any quick results. And I think that the major breakthrough came with the longshore organizations in San Francisco with Harry Bridges' organization. And then of course, the strike, the general strike. And then it dawned on the CP [Communist Party] in Los Angeles, there should be some party organizers there, and I was sent down as a full-time organizer in San Pedro, in about 1934, after the strike. It gives you some idea of what it is.

[00:08:48] **HOWARD:** Before we get there I want to probe this MWIU and get as much as I can. Why weren't the seamen turned off by the revolutionary rhetoric of the MWIU?

[00:08:59] **MEYER:** I think the seamen had a lot of time at sea to talk, to debate this thing. It was something that went on there, continuing, that was the debate. And that the revolutionary seamen were capable enough, in

my opinion, to convince many of them that they were offering some that had possibilities. And remember this is not so long—right after the Russian Revolution and the changes took there. And the fact the seamen in the Soviet Union had so much better conditions. I think all of that was pointed out, nothing was hidden at that time, I think that helped it. And the sea, in my opinion, attracted a type of people that were more susceptible to accepting such ideas. We could see that by the fact that the seamen were used by the Party whose goons from time to time, and some of their needs. And these guys went—they didn't know why—they were told that this was it, and they came in into helping prevent breaking up of the strikes.

Footloose, not married. Very few of them married as far as I can remember. Interesting people. By that I mean they were not just run-of-the-mill type of a person at all who wanted this job, a home, and a family. They were looking for more than that. That's the way I saw that.

[00:10:36] **HOWARD:** And let me ask you in relationship to that, or for other reasons, why were the longshoremen not as supportive of the MWIU? Do you have any ideas?

[00:10:48] **MEYER:** I'm trying to think. [pause] I think they were much, much more stable group of people. Most of them had homes and families in the area that they worked, a stake in the setup. Lots of farm-born workers worked at the IWL. Even more so than the ISU [International Seamen's Union], in the seamen's union. San Pedro had a very large section of the longshoremen, who were German-American. And they had their own cultural organizations—I went to some of their parties. We danced, in typical beer garden style and they seemed to be a much more stable group of people, some of them with the same job for five, ten years.

[00:11:51] **HOWARD:** That's very interesting because German workers in other parts of the country were very radical because they come in contact with Marxian ideologies.

[00:11:57] **MEYER:** Well, these workers were knowledgeable. And we only had a very few of them recruited to the Party as far as I remember. But I don't think they were afraid of revolutionary thought, but they did not participate. As far as I can say, they had their own grouping—this is true with other minority groupings too. Finns was the same thing. You had, in Berkeley and probably here—completely apart from the rest of the movement, yet very radicalized. And I don't know if you know the history of the Finns here, they were very strong. They had their own building, their own organization. It was very effective.

Now I can't think of any other reason, maybe their work in San Pedro as far as I know was a little more steady and their lifestyle, I think, was more, more [pause] stabilized would be the word. Because the seamen were everywhere, would be here one day and not—. On the other hand, a number of the seamen, after they—as they pertain to this—when they're ready to quit going to sea and want to settle down would become longshoremen and similar industries. And I think we had Bridges going to that too. Going to sea and then he decided to remain here and become a longshoreman.

[00:13:33] **HOWARD:** How did the MWIU carry out agitation on the waterfront? Do you remember?

[00:13:37] **MEYER:** Yes, they had this newspapers and literature and meetings, continually. And they went to the [inaudible] _____ Union, the seamen's union, they raised hell there. Ended up getting a business agent killed—I don't know if you heard about that, San Pedro, yeah. They taunted him and taunted him to such an

extent that he became very concerned about his life. Carried a gun! And one evening I believe, he came down to some trouble at the meeting and the police came, and he thought the police were a part of the goons and they'd get him. He shot at them, and they shot back and killed him. Fidel was his name.

[00:14:26] **HOWARD:** Sounds familiar.

[00:14:26] **MEYER:** You can look that up if that's of any interest to you.

[00:14:29] **HOWARD:** When did that happen do you remember?

[00:14:30] **MEYER:** I'd say around 19—between 1934 and '35. The latter part of the '35 and sometime—the latter part of '34 and sometime '35. I was there in the area, but I didn't participate. When I was active in participating in San Pedro, my main contacts were with the seamen. And they usually said, they rent a shack as they called it and keep it going with the different seamen coming and going. And so they had a mimeograph machine there and if anything happened on any ship hand leaflets out to tell the other seamen what was going on.

[00:15:15] **HOWARD:** So they really, deliberately targeted the seamen, right? As opposed to the longshoremen?

[00:15:19] **MEYER:** Yes, more so. The importance of the longshoremen became evident when the longshoremen strike took place and it was all centered around San Francisco. Not much of it carried on in San Pedro. Except, I do not know the details of how—what took place in San Pedro during the longshoremen strike. As far as I could tell, there was exactly going on much in San Pedro besides picket lines in the waterfront and so on. I may be wrong, so you may have to search that out. But the longshoremen that I met were members of the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] or former members of the IWW. Many of them were around—the ones that I met were around the age of 35 or 40 and more. And who had the feeling that that carried on the struggle and had not made much progress. That's the feeling they were feeling, but were still willing to go ahead. And were willing to work with the communists which I was the representative for publishing The Waterfront Worker, a long legal-sized document that we put out once a month.

[00:16:40] **HOWARD:** When did you begin publishing that? Do you remember? After the strike, then?

[00:16:45] **MEYER:** After the strike. There may have been one before, but I don't recall.

[00:16:55] **HOWARD:** Okay, so there were a lot of IWW guys. How many do you think were active in the strike? Do you have idea? Were they composed of strike leadership?

[00:17:01] **MEYER:** I don't know. They composed the strike, then I don't know details. I should not give you [details] , you're going to have to find some other source for that.

[00:17:08] **HOWARD:** Do you know Paul Ware? He was a Wob [IWW member] in the waterfront? He was active in the '22 strike.

[00:17:14] **MEYER:** 'Twenty-two?

[00:17:15] **HOWARD:** ‘Twenty-three strike.

[00:17:17] **MEYER:** Paul Weir.

[00:17:19] **HOWARD:** Ware, actually. W-A-R-E

[00:17:21] **MEYER:** I don't remember. Have you met him?

[00:17:24] **HOWARD:** Yeah, he lives out in Palm Springs, he's like 95 years old or something like that.

[00:17:28] **MEYER:** Did you talk to him?

[00:17:29] **HOWARD:** He wasn't very lucid to be honest. But at 95 you expect that.

[00:17:33] **MEYER:** There's a young man by the name of Ernie Palmer that's a longshoremen in San Pedro who should know quite a bit. But I don't know if he was that involved in longshore activities until after 1935. But he's younger than I, and he participated with me in the demonstrations in the Olympic Games in 1932. Ernie Palmer was his name. If you have chance to run into him, he's worthwhile.

[00:18:10] **HOWARD:** You know if these Wobblies had been involved in the 1923 strike, did they ever talk about that?

[00:18:15] **MEYER:** They never said that. I cannot recall. They probably did. I'm pretty good at recalling in the past, but I do not recall that they talked very much. There was the—you know about the Upton Sinclair arrest and all of that in San Pedro, for reading the Constitution? We had another killing that year of a seamen that later turned into a celebrated trial of a seaman of the name of Brit. I don't think it carries too much meaning to what you're trying to get at.

[00:18:58] **HOWARD:** Ok. Let me ask you, do you—what were the guys like that went down to the waterfront from the MWIU to carry out the agitation? Were they just rank-and-file seamen?

[00:19:10] **MEYER:** Off-hand you would say that they were. At least at that time—well some of them were officer patrolmen for the MWIU. But in the main it was very much the rank-and-file struggle. No one in particular was concerned about the officers. And the lifestyle there was when you came off the ship you would spend your money to feed and drink with the others, till it ran out. And then you'd wait for another hot one to come in. And they would share their money, quite liberal that way. And as to how they got by, in any other way I do not know because there was no soup kitchen and such and I don't recall anyone asking or trying. There was no welfare system, so I guess that's part of the reason they were driven back to the ship, as soon as money ran out. They stay out on the shore and as long as money was available for something to eat and then they would ship out or go someplace else. They also rode the rails to other ports. And if they heard of any possibilities, they'd go up on the freights and go up to San Francisco, Seattle, and so on.

[00:20:41] **HOWARD:** Would you say that the MWIU agitation was too radical for the longshoremen perhaps? Or that it didn't make sense to them? Or—I mean it's a common pattern. The MWIU seems to have done most its work on the West Coast among seamen, and I can understand why that would be true.

[00:20:59] **MEYER:** Well it was organized for marine workers and it could include longshoremen.

[00:21:03] **HOWARD:** It was really a long charter, and it specified that it wouldn't involve both longshoremen and seamen. It didn't.

[00:21:09] **MEYER:** No it didn't feel as if longshoremen were a part of that. I would offhand agree with you that the program was too radical before the men to be acceptable. Not that they were afraid of it as such, but that they didn't believe that it was possible.

[00:21:34] **HOWARD:** What do you mean by that?

[00:21:36] **MEYER:** That I mean that you talk to a worker and present your program, he would not be astonished or say, 'Oh it's impossible, you're being anti-American.' Nothing like that. He would just feel that you were being too idealistic because you can't get too much of what you're asking for.

[00:21:54] **HOWARD:** That's what I was after. I agree entirely. And Bridges said the exact same thing in his testimony.

[00:22:01] **MEYER:** Really?

[00:22:02] **HOWARD:** When the MWIU would come down to the dock, he said, 'The men would say that's fine, but how are we going to eat today and the next day?' And he said that it wasn't that they were antagonistic at all.

[00:22:10] **MEYER:** No, they weren't. Well the fact is when he was raised and fairly good [inaudible] _____ for Communist Party activity amongst them, [inaudible] _____.

[00:22:21] **HOWARD:** It's surprising—what did I mean, do you have any idea of what did people thought? I mean if you went to a longshoreman, for instance, and ran down here to talk about the need for revolution and you said, 'Well, we're not opposed to revolution but we just don't see it as around the corner,' you could've easily just said, 'Well guys, let's bring it along slowly,' but you didn't it just that you said—

[00:22:40] **MEYER:** Well, we did not drop them as such. We just felt that needed more education that was the ignorance that did not understand. Therefore, they were not ready to participate but because we felt that conditions were right, which was quite leftist and wrong in retrospect, as time was proven in developing. But we were under great strain of red-baiting by the press at the time and by the society in general. But yet I felt that in all of my work there, especially in the unemployed and so on, and we agitated very heavily and was not really rejected by them and simply listened to them and that's about all. And in some ways that's okay too, but we were too far out, no question about it. And in comparison to the rest of the country and the left-wing communist movement, the Los Angeles area was way out even there to such an extent it received very heavy criticism from Williams E. Foster and the National Committee Communist Party that the Los Angeles party was trying to take in the entire police state all by themselves.

[00:24:08] **HOWARD:** This was in '33?

[00:24:08] **MEYER:** That is during that period we had hundreds of arrests and what not, and beatings. And workers got to such a point that when we would call a demonstration, in the plaza of Los Angeles downtown, we would turn down about 150 of us, about 50 police, and workers would stand way out on a circle to watch the action. They wanted to see and didn't want to come any closer and come get their head beaten. It was just crazy.

[00:24:37] **HOWARD:** So you guys were even too sectarian for the communists then?

[00:24:39] **MEYER:** Oh yeah, definitely.

[00:24:41] **HOWARD:** What did he tell you guys? Do you remember what he said?

[00:24:42] **MEYER:** He said—Bill Foster? He said that 'you were setting us up to get killed. And if they kill when I'm speaking up there I wouldn't be a bit surprised. I had no protection from the workers.' And the politics went on and the situation began to change, got to changing in '36 with the development of the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] , quite a bit. Los Angeles, still, as far as I can recall was still far behind.

[00:25:13] **HOWARD:** Why was such an extremely left-wing culture there among the party people? Why did you take that approach?

[00:25:18] **MEYER:** Well, because they were, in my opinion, very imbued with the Russian Revolution. And the leaders were Russian Jews who felt very close to the Revolution and felt that the same thing, believed in the same thing could happen here, because they saw the same conditions being very bad in this country. And basically I don't think they attempted to understand the thinking of the general American worker. I think the foreign-born workers who were not born here, were still mostly sympathetic for us. Especially among the Mexican workers. We had quite a following. But among the American workers, second generation and so on, we were not in any way reaching them at all, we tried, but only ones we reached were [inaudible] _____. Lots of those.

[00:26:18] **HOWARD:** Did you ever question the appropriateness of the third period of the so-called revolutionary [inaudible] _____ at the time?

[00:26:26] **MEYER:** Did I question? Not, not sufficiently. Not sufficient. At the time, and I still do think that I understood the revolution in depth, I understood from what we read on Marxist Leninism and that too was limited. That basically, that party pushed the economic program of the writings, which were important. Never touched on the social programs and social discussion, especially Marx. So that we were—as far as the revolution, we were semi-illiterate. We could not deal with other forces around us, all we know was bread and butter. If you haven't got a job, you must become a revolutionary. See that's what we felt. We did not deal the other forces around us, which I have found in terms of life, are very important forces to deal with.

[00:27:33] **HOWARD:** Then the 1934 strike becomes to develop cost-wide and you said you were not on the waterfront at the time?

[00:27:38] **MEYER:** No, not in '34. In 1934 I was in Los Angeles, a part of unemployed council, and then later, organizer for the TUEL. We had a very big milk strike there. Turned out 1,000 workers.

[00:27:54] **HOWARD:** Do you remember any impressions about the '34 strike?

[00:27:58] **MEYER:** Oh very much, I really felt that this was the road to revolution. Very, very excited about it. Just so happen that I was there the day before, on Sunday and they told me—on a vacation, with a car with my wife, and they said 'If you wait another day all the gas stations, will be closed and you wouldn't be able to get out of town.' So we left the day before [inaudible] _____ and we very excited. And I've gotten to know Harry who's down there, in San Pedro, organizing. You've heard of Harry Lundberg? He was the competition of that time, also a Wobbly. And we brought the two of them together to talk things through and did not succeed to get any place. Each one was looking out for his own turf. And the thing gave us a big boost in striking in San Francisco and we did not hear of very much activity up in Seattle and other parts of it. I don't know even now with what was taking place and other places. All I knew was San Francisco. But, the [?Vaulteen?] coming out during the strikes, the big strikes and all of that with the National Guard.

[00:29:21] **HOWARD:** Do you remember when Dickie Parker was killed in San Pedro? Do you ever hear about that?

[00:29:27] **MEYER:** No, what year is that?

[00:29:28] **HOWARD:** That was in '34.

[00:29:28] **MEYER:** During the strike?

[00:29:32] **HOWARD:** Early on. It was one of the earliest incidents.

[00:29:34] **MEYER:** I don't remember. Have you gotten some of the name of the—locate some of the actives of that period?

[00:29:43] **HOWARD:** Quite a bit. I've written a chapter on it already. If you'd like to read it, I have some of it.

[00:29:48] **MEYER:** You've already written about it? I'd love to get people educated—

[00:29:50] **HOWARD:** Sure, sure.

[00:29:51] **MEYER:** It indicated a fairly solid picket line there in San Pedro?

[00:29:57] **HOWARD:** Well, the way—

[END PART ONE/BEGIN PART TWO]

Okay I just want to talk just a little more on the left-sectarianism, if you may, of the Los Angeles labor movement. Why don't you tell me any other recollections of it or anything that you may recall?

[00:30:13] **MEYER:** Well—

[00:30:15] **HOWARD:** How did it affect your relationships with AFL unions for instance?

[00:30:19] **MEYER:** It was bad. It turned me against them as being scab unions and the lack of understanding that this was made up of workers. We just saw basically the officials. As the leaders who tied their unions closely to the system as such and therefore were in contradiction with us. And they were not accomplishing much.

[00:30:53] **HOWARD:** So then what did you propose to do as an alternative with this left-wing strategy?

[00:30:57] **MEYER:** To organize unions of our own and this fell through up to about 1936. And to organize to such an extent and to take over their unions if possible. Which in Los Angeles was extremely difficult because the officials worked with the police department very carefully. To the extent of having their Red Squad, which you've heard of, come to the conventions of the AFL and to find out the different Reds and have them taken out of the meetings to such an extent you see. And so that you didn't last very long. I myself was expelled from the Teamsters Union in San Pedro as a communist.

[00:31:39] **HOWARD:** What year was that?

[00:31:40] **MEYER:** Nineteen thirty-four.

[00:31:45] **HOWARD:** Were you open—you were obviously an open communist?

[00:31:47] **MEYER:** Well, it wasn't—well, sure. Anyone knew what a communist was, knows that I was one. I didn't go up to people and tell them, but anyone that going on and knew I was an open communist, yes.

[00:32:00] **HOWARD:** So you were open to extent where at a meeting you'd say, 'As communists we believe such and such?' Would you say something like that?

[00:32:08] **MEYER:** I wouldn't say that at union meetings, I was both a local member for the Teamsters and also for a while in the Electrical Union, and no I wouldn't do that. And no one asked me in that manner. But in talking to each other and so on and agitating and urging people to join us it was obvious I was a party member.

[00:32:30] **HOWARD:** And when they tried to red-bait you, or did red-bait you, and say, 'You're a Communist, please leave the room'—were you ever—?

[00:32:35] **MEYER:** Well, I'd defend myself.

[00:32:36] **HOWARD:** On what grounds?

[00:32:37] **MEYER:** On the ground that I was trying to do something for the working class and I was trying to explain and educate that is on it and we should be listened to. That we had rights, constitutional rights, et cetera. That's about all we could do.

[00:32:52] **HOWARD:** So you didn't deny—

[00:32:53] **MEYER:** No, I didn't deny. Did not. Never deny.

[00:32:55] **HOWARD:** Now, the thing that troubles me about this period is—a sober assessment would suggest that if you look around and see you've got 25 seamen, SIU or whatever it was in those days, has several hundred, and you weren't making much headway, in terms of winning over broad masses of workers.

[00:33:19] **MEYER:** We're having a good time. [laughs] Exciting means there was a struggle going on and fights and expulsions, and back again into the unions, and trying to win offices. Even in the AFL unions in that way and stirring things up. Everybody was disquiet and going along. It's kind of a polite way of approaching it, I think many of them were adventurous guys, in fact do you see how quickly the Party dissolved and things weren't right, you know? We had a membership of about 100,000 to 10,000, in a period of ten years or so. Anyway this is what it is. Because when the decision was made in '36 to dissolve the MMU, there were guys that bitterly opposed it and held off and say that it was a sell-out and so on. I remember that [inaudible] _____ had said that in the party. Yet in retrospect, so he'd have to see how stupid in many ways it was to do it that way. And on the other hand, what the hell were you going to do? The argument was 'I'm a worker, I'm a machinist, I'm going to work as a union man and they don't let me into the union, because they don't like my politics. What the hell was I going to do except organize myself in some other way?' We had people like that. To organize [inaudible] _____.

[00:34:41] **HOWARD:** So let me ask you in the 1934 seamen's or longshore strike, actually the maritime strike, how rooted was the party in the waterfront? Was it pretty much a separate entity or was it integrated with the workers? How would you characterize it?

[00:34:56] **MEYER:** I would characterize it by still being separated. Separated—there was not—the party members and stuff were not a part of the union movement or the worker's movement. In fact, I was characterized as Los Angeles party more so than I was of being a part of a cultural group. Mostly the Russian Jews in the main, who had their own form of cultural activities, the [inaudible] _____, and the Jewish choruses and a lot of that. And some little bit of Russian activity carried on more so up here. But as far as being in neighborhood, and knowing their neighbors and having their neighbors, that did not exist as far as I could tell. This is the weakness of it. Of the party. But what is remarkable that in spite of all that we still made considerable progress. I recruited 50 members of the Communist Party in one month in Los Angeles during the activity of the unemployed movement that I was very active in. I didn't even know I was doing it fully until I was pointed out in doing it later on. These guys showed interest in being more than just members and saying, "What's going on here?" And I tell them, "You want to sign up?"

In the case of the milk strike we set up a strike committee of some 25 milkers, really milkers. So then I was the only one on that outside that accepted as the organizer TUEL and told them I was inviting a Communist Party organizer to attend one of our meetings and tell you what it's about. And so he came, Lawrence Ross came and made a very good talk about what the party was about. And handed me 25 applications and said, "Here, some of these guys want to join the Party." And so I took them and passed them out to all 25 of them and signed them up there. He made a very good story, got a good approach to it. But to say, well, think again, the positive fact is that a few of those later on went to fight in Spain, the Civil War, which was good. Others became organizers in other fields—we broadened their life. We opened up vistas that they never dreamt existed, of being a communist. And besides that, it was exciting as hell. We carried guns and here we were afraid of guns, we didn't want guns around the union offices and we urged them to leave them at home. But that's the way they were. We knew that

the police would be around, we raided our own headquarters where were head—and we found out about six or eight of them that ditched in different places that they'd—. It was—let's say the minimum was quite an interesting way of spending your time.

[00:38:06] **HOWARD:** How old were you in 1930?

[00:38:07] **MEYER:** Ninety-thirty. . . I was 26 years old.

[00:38:11] **HOWARD:** Okay, you were young then.

[00:38:12] **MEYER:** Relatively, yeah. Relatively. Very dedicated from the time the Russian Revolution in 1917. It wasn't too hard. My family wasn't radical. The only other one of the family that became interested was my older sister who's two years older [than Meyer] . Otherwise, the others didn't think of it, or were proud of it and so on. I was a headliner because I was arrested so many times. It was some 32 times. Walk on the street, pick you up and for the criminal syndicalism. They'd keep you for three days and let you go. Then in the Olympic demonstration, I got hit in the all-together by [inaudible] _____, and it didn't do any harm I believe, it was helpful in many ways. And it's this little group that's causing all this agitation, me and others and so on. And we developed a sense of community that we were really doing something and established in establishing a Red Squad for about ten people on the payroll, working—practically opening with the Chamber of Commerce, do it to keep us down and to carry on.

[00:39:27] **HOWARD:** The level of repression of Pedro and L.A. against the left seems to be, always, some of the highest I've ever read about.

[00:39:35] **MEYER:** In L.A. especially, in San Pedro because it was a limited population at that time, I think 6,000 or 8,000 people there, as far as I could remember. They may have not been the same excitement except what was going on the waterfront in the bars and so on and so forth. Fights and part of this was the struggle that went on.

[00:39:56] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a couple of questions about the '34 strike, about the longshore union, the ILA [International Longshore Association] at the time was under fairly conservative leadership.

[00:40:04] **MEYER:** Joe Ryan.

[00:40:05] **HOWARD:** Yeah, even the local in Pedro was I think—was the name Pedro Pete was the name of the guy that was—

[00:40:10] **MEYER:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:40:11] **HOWARD:** And several others like that. And during the course of the strike, they did things like—the membership passed an anti-Communist resolution and the resolution instructed all members of the Communist Party to leave the union and if they found anyone who was in the Party that they would expel them. Do you remember any of that happening?

[00:40:29] **MEYER:** No, I don't.

[00:40:31] **HOWARD:** Or any rallies that the Party may have conducted during the waterfront strike?

[00:40:34] **MEYER:** No. The Party in San Pedro worked through the International Labor Defense [ILD] . They had a very good man by the name of [?Setrim?] who had it very well off and was very well-liked and was a sailor. And workers knew him and trusted him and he developed quite a following there. And so whenever there'd be an arrest or something the International Labor Defense in San Pedro would come to them. The party opened the—I don't think they held any party meetings and such.

[00:41:03] **HOWARD:** That was during the strike that it happened?

[00:41:04] **MEYER:** During the strike, yes. It was the ILD. That reminds me—

[00:41:14] **HOWARD:** Go on.

[00:41:15] **MEYER:** I'm thinking—are we on?

[00:41:17] **HOWARD:** Yeah, go ahead.

[00:41:18] **MEYER:** Elaine Yoneda. You heard of her?

[00:41:24] **HOWARD:** I talk with her on Thursday.

[00:41:26] **MEYER:** You did? That's fine, I don't know if she helped you.

[00:41:28] **HOWARD:** I will be talking with her.

[00:41:29] **MEYER:** Oh, you will be talking. You'll find a different person to deal with. She's one of our old friends but has remained very rigid. Karl [Yoneda's husband] is coming out with his book, it's not out. She may be more helpful; she's remembers better than I.

[00:41:54] **HOWARD:** Okay, when was the decision made that you would go on to the waterfront? Tell me about that decision.

[00:42:01] **MEYER:** Actually, what happened was Vera [Baylin's wife?] wanted to complete a masters in social work and decided to go to Columbia [University] in New York for it. That meant moving there, so I came to the Party for permission. They wouldn't give it to me. Permission that explained that it was [inaudible] _____ and that we were needed to be here very badly. We were very short on people. This is right after the strike, so I told Vera about it, she was very unhappy and so I went back again and said that something should be done, then [loud noise] [inaudible] _____. And they said, 'Okay. You'll spend a year in San Pedro and you'll be organizer there.' I was separate from Vera because she was working in the city and then at the time you will see. And more or less they indicated that they were giving permission. So I spent the year in San Pedro, organizing.

[00:43:01] **HOWARD:** You were doing time for a year in San Pedro for a year so you could go to New York?

[00:43:06] **MEYER:** Yeah, that's what it amounts to. I didn't feel that in any way that I was hurting the movement. I felt I could be active in New York, which I was, I was very active in New York—far more active

there even in the different conditions, but this is how it came about. Now, up to that time I wasn't particularly interested in San Pedro, outside of the seamen's activity, which I followed because they kept Los Angeles and participated in that, and so on. So that's how I ended up.

One of the instances there in 1931. I made friends with Lawrence Emory a seaman, born in Sacramento [California] who was there at the time and came off and was more interested with what we were doing in the Party when the movement came on. I was friends with him. I met him one morning after a strike broke out in Imperial Valley. And I met him on the stairs coming from the Party headquarters. He tells me they called him in and asked him to come down to Imperial Valley as an agricultural worker organizer. He said, 'Hell, I'm a seaman, I wouldn't know a damn thing about it. So I told him I wouldn't go, but of course that didn't suit me at all.' So we went and got coffee and talked to him about it and turned around and got him to go Imperial Valley. And three days later he was in prison in a criminal syndicalism and then ended up doing four years in San Quentin. Three days solitary. Whole committee there.

One guy, Frank Spector was convicted even though there was no proof that he was even in Imperial Valley. So you can see that it was extremely hot area. And they would send down the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], representative was beaten up and thrown into jail. Finally, Roosevelt sent down the ex-general or something, was a Safford [possible reference to someone employed at Safford Correctional Facility, Arizona], got chased out of town. It was pretty hot situation. Gives you some idea of the atmosphere that we lived in. And I probably represented about 40 or 50 people of that kind, there was other party members with families but we were really hot. So we were ready to take on anything that we thought would advance this cause. And the positive thing is that many people that came into this activity for the first time benefited personally from the fact that they were opened up to new ideas, which I placed importance on. Not necessarily the socialist ideas, but other ideas too. And many of them had become very good organizers all over the country because of the experience that they had.

[00:46:02] **HOWARD:** Why did the Party send you to San Pedro as opposed to somewhere else? And why the waterfront?

[00:46:08] **MEYER:** I showed very good activity in the milker's strike. Very good. I was also able to accept orders quite fully which I think something they gave consideration to. Heaven knows I was dependable and not helter-skelter and may object to some of the things that they wanted me to do. But I would carry out the decisions that were made.

[00:46:35] **HOWARD:** Were the seamen intransigent? That is to say, did they sort of tell the party to get lost if they didn't like what they heard in certain points in time?

[00:46:44] **MEYER:** I haven't and did not run into—encounter such things at that time. You see, later on quite a different ball game after the AMU was established and started the struggle with Tommy Ray and all the other people—but at that time such information didn't come to me that they did that. What I saw and what I was expected was that turnover if they came and when the seamen, especially coming to look for work would be here one day. And then were always keeping people with a certain, assign certain party members to this area, you and there, and so on. And that was done through Roy Hudson—I'm sure you've heard the story. He just died recently.

Anyway, this is the way I saw the Party. And so you begin to identify maybe 25, 30 outstanding seamen. Some of in the Gulf, some of them in the Great Lakes and so on. And then the others were not too visible. I do know from first hand they did come to meetings in San Pedro, participated, and put out leaflets could called in Los Angeles where we had a furniture strike. Organized. They came in to help us maintain the picket line. Like the Front—like the Marines. Front-fighters—they were looked upon everywhere.

[00:48:07] **HOWARD:** How did the 1934 strike change your perception of the longshoremen, in particular? I mean you went to San Pedro and were obviously were concerned—

[00:48:18] **MEYER:** Longshoremen—seamen. I felt that that longshore strike proved that the longshoremen were in the revolutionary vanguard and therefore it was important to recruit more of them. They could accomplish more once they became more understanding, more revolutionary in carrying out the work.

[00:48:41] **HOWARD:** Okay, so after the strike what was your attempt in San Pedro? Was it—

[00:48:47] **MEYER:** No, The Waterfront Worker to be distributed among longshoremen—I wish I had copies of it, maybe you can run into it. Look in—if you haven't looked into the California Historical Society in San Francisco. Carries a lot of documents. And has been very close with the left.

[00:49:08] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me ask you, is this The Waterfront Worker that was issued locally in San Pedro or—?

[00:49:12] **MEYER:** Locally in San Pedro.

[00:49:16] **HOWARD:** Or the same one out of San Francisco?

[00:49:17] **MEYER:** No, locally in San Pedro.

[00:49:17] **HOWARD:** California Historical Society, huh?

[00:49:19] **MEYER:** There's a possibility that someone has turned over copies to them.

[00:49:23] **HOWARD:** And what was the content of this document?

[00:49:25] **MEYER:** Content was basically, I would call it revolutionary trade unionism. One Big Union concept to a degree I think was put into it. Industrial Union that all the waterfront workers including seamen should belong to one union. So, I don't recall if we included teamsters in it. In New York we did. But because they hit the docks all the time, I'm afraid I don't recall whether we did that in San Pedro. I didn't get that much contact with the teamsters.

[00:49:54] **HOWARD:** You had contact I presume with the regional party leadership out of San Francisco?

[00:50:00] **MEYER:** Oh, sure.

[00:50:01] **HOWARD:** Darcy and those folks?

[00:50:01] **MEYER:** Yes.

[00:50:02] **HOWARD:** Was your Waterfront Worker similar in format to the one that came out here?

[00:50:07] **MEYER:** I can't tell you because I don't recall enough about The Waterfront Worker from here. I knew that there was very important instrument here.

[00:50:15] **HOWARD:** Who wrote The Waterfront Worker in Pedro?

[00:50:17] **MEYER:** Myself and a couple of longshoremen who were ex-members of the IW—or ex-members of the IWW. And one or two others. It was a limited editorial board.

[00:50:35] **HOWARD:** Did you have any rank-and-file workers?

[00:50:36] **MEYER:** One or two. That's not a hell of a lot. One or two guys and they brought—we weren't secretive about it, but on the other hand it was not something that we—and I'm trying to think whether I can remember under what auspices we printed it. I know it was not the CP [Communist Party] for sure. But it was probably under the rank-and-file longshore worker.

[00:51:02] **HOWARD:** It wasn't the MWIU or anything like that?

[00:51:05] **MEYER:** No, the MWIU had its own publication at that time.

[00:51:08] **HOWARD:** Oh okay, so you had this under rank-and-file or something like that?

[00:51:12] **MEYER:** Rank-and-file, yeah.

[00:51:13] **HOWARD:** And it was separate from—?

[00:51:15] **MEYER:** Separate from San Francisco.

[00:51:17] **HOWARD:** And separate from the MWIU publication.

[00:51:18] **MEYER:** Separate from the—yes.

[00:51:20] **HOWARD:** So was it a less-sectarian in its approach than the—before the strike? That is, were you willing to write on the ILA—?

[00:51:30] **MEYER:** I think it was less sectarian because we were working for a united front for all the, all of the waterfront workers. I would be say that it would be the less sectarian, because we already began to have a taste here in San Francisco in the general strike.

[00:51:48] **HOWARD:** Did you ever talk about job actions that were taking place? Or encouragement to take job actions or—?

[00:51:55] **MEYER:** Yeah, in this form there were still ship-owners and others who were chiseling on conditions. Even though there was an agreement signed, we should still enforce the contract. It was the first time we were dealing with that. I remember that a IWW member kind of rejected to that. He said that it was not too meaningful that what we needed was social change and so on. But you have to keep in mind that is an initiative that bothers people and they're supposed to get a dollar an hour, and they're only getting 85 cents and so on. So this was a condition that we were pushing on it. Which was in line with my general thinking at the time. That the immediate struggle had to be look after too, not just the [inaudible] _____.

[00:52:46] **HOWARD:** Why did you recognize that at that point? Why didn't you earlier or—?

[00:52:50] **MEYER:** I guess I myself had been discriminated against in working—the young worker always got less pay than the older workers. I got fired a few times for talking up about it. You see, I was unhappy about it. The weight scale was in [inaudible] _____. The production shot was 50 cents an hour, I had to work for 35 cents an hour.

[00:53:12] **HOWARD:** But you still had to do that before in 1933 and '32, and yet, at that point you were pushing a very revolutionary line.

[00:53:19] **MEYER:** Oh yes, yes. See when you have no direct shop contact, you tend to push a more revolutionary line. When you get down to the nitty-gritty on the shop or on the job, then it becomes a different ball game. You follow me?

[00:53:39] **HOWARD:** Yeah, very much so. What was it about the nitty gritty work in San Pedro that made it more realistic? Was it the fact that you were in contact with some longshoremen?

[00:53:50] **MEYER:** Yeah, I think so. Yeah, sure, sure, fully. In contact in meaningful ways. I met with them before, but this was actually discussing job conditions, danger of work, we're pushing for someone working at that time, as I recall, ten hours a day. And I'd tell them and they needed the money, and so on. And even after the general strike.

[00:54:14] **HOWARD:** Do you have any idea of the circulation was? Of the local Waterfront Worker?

[00:54:18] **MEYER:** Oh yes. No more than 200 copies.

[00:54:23] **HOWARD:** Okay, so it doesn't sound like it was quite the force that it was up here.

[00:54:26] **MEYER:** Oh no. Not at all. It's not nearly the force. We didn't have that quite of a movement there, I'd say.

[00:54:36] **HOWARD:** And why do you think you didn't have that kind of movement there? Compared to San Francisco?

[00:54:43] **MEYER:** Because it was still, in a lot of ways, a part of the White Spot of America, the open-shop area, and you know how that came about with the McNamara Times—The Los Angeles Times bombing and then from then on. And in the Pedro-Bloomington area, there was a roughly small population, everybody knew

each other more or less. They didn't have that kind of an effect like a big city does. In Los Angeles, we got lost, you know. But there I think that brought about—San Francisco the fact that it's so closely related to [inaudible] _____ city, it had its effect. Because it did not start in Oakland, the movement, it was just as much more word going on in Oakland on the waterfront as there was in San Francisco, but it did in San Francisco. Do you follow me?

[00:55:31] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I do. I don't want to put words in your mouth, I'm going to ask you a question now, let's see, do you think—well, let me put it this way, the Party seemed to have a leadership in the 1934 strike. They led the strike in San Francisco, certainly. Many of them did or people who were sympathetic to it. And they merged out of the strike in a very strong position. Now in Pedro, it doesn't sound like you had that kind of direction that you had in Pedro, that the Communist Party had in San Francisco, played a smaller role in San Pedro in the '34 strike, at the end of the strike, you didn't have as much influence, so what I'm wondering is, if the party had used a different strategy in '33 and had really taken the leadership of the strike, when it finally did erupt in Pedro, would you have been in better shape? Do you think that contributed to a lot of it?

[00:56:23] **MEYER:** Well they say that they were able to take it. It's a matter of not having the ability to take it. I mean there was no out and out longshoremen who were party members. At all. Now here at least you have them very close—Archie Brown—

[00:56:41] **HOWARD:** Why do you think you had them here and not down there? Do you ever stop and reflect on that?

[00:56:46] **MEYER:** Well, [pause] I think that the Party concentration on the longshore waterfront was more susceptible than to the waterfront to do that concentration than it was in San Pedro some 20 miles away. So there was not—although we tried, but they were just not there. I think there was almost a village characteristic of the area that led itself. It took time to do that. That attempts were made to do that. And seamen were very involved to do work among the longshoremen. We were limited. It might also be that the influence of the IWW, which was anti-Communist or at least competitors, was strong enough to keep other longshoremen from coming into our ranks. I'm sure the seamen contacted the longshoremen in San Pedro and Bloomington, but they were not successful doing it.

[00:57:56] **HOWARD:** Was the IWW a pretty strong force then in '33 and among those years?

[00:57:59] **MEYER:** I think it was, yes, because they had some big struggles there, earlier in '27 and so on. Had big struggles. And this is my summation on why, this is away from the center of the population and influenced strongly, and again we're talking really of small number people becoming influenced at the—those kind of people were more influenced by the Wobblies, by the IWW. They had a very good argument, very similar to ours—the need for industrial organization, one union and so on.

The intention was there. The intention and the attention by the leadership. In fact, Sam Darcy, a peer would come down and talk about it and there was an exchange. Harry Bridges was down there, trying to do it. And I would say Harry Bridges didn't go down to San Pedro to organize the Party members. He was there to organize the longshoremen, which he did and did a good job. Good exceptions there. I remember some big, good-sized meetings, but he was—

[00:59:01] **HOWARD:** And this was after '34? Right, or yeah?

[00:59:03] **MEYER:** After '34, I don't remember before. But I'm sure he must've had some context there before. You're going to see Harry? Or—?

[00:59:11] **HOWARD:** You know, I called his number, and it doesn't seem to get through to him, I'm getting someone at the other end of the line. [AUDIO CUTS OFF]

Okay, we're on tape again and I wanted to ask you, do you ever remember in July of 1933, there was something called the Open Letter that I guess it was [Earl] Browder at that time that circulated it. Do you remember that at all?

[00:59:32] **MEYER:** Yes. I don't remember the contents, but that's a statement that we tried to grow out in the Party. That's it yeah.

[00:59:42] **HOWARD:** Do you remember any discussions around that? It was the transition, as I read it, between the third period and the popular front, and the open letter introduces it.

[END PART TWO/BEGIN PART THREE]

I wanted to ask you about the open letter which was written in September—

[01:00:03] **MEYER:** Have you read it recently?

[01:00:04] **HOWARD:** Yeah. And basically, the content was something like, 'We have to broaden our base, we're not building successful bases within the labor movement. And we have to consider working within the AFL unions as well as building dual revolutionary unions.' It's something like that. What I'm wondering is whether it had an impact in Pedro after the strike or even before the strike, if you can recall that. It would've have been July of '33, it was issued.

[01:00:34] **MEYER:** I recall that it was very heavily debated because it meant some changes, and the old-timers couldn't accept change like that. It meant also that they thought it might be successful. But the final resolution that came through, accepted Browder's line. You know this is after a very serious action fight that took place in the Party. And there were still some very sore spots remaining that people were trying to— [William] Foster and [Jay] Lovestone, I don't know if you know that period.

[01:01:18] **HOWARD:** Tell me a little bit about that.

[01:01:26] **MEYER:** Lovestone became the leader of the party about 1928 or so and ran into great opposition by Foster. Foster was more oriented toward trade union labor movement. And Lovestone wanted to involve the cultural life in this country and to broaden that out and did not particularly aim in the direction to Americanize the party although Foster didn't do too much in that respect. Also, Lovestone was accused of arguing that the United States of America was exceptional, not the same as Russia or European countries that he had a different approach. And so the struggle became very divided. And the CI—the Communist International Russian Party stepped in and removed Lovestone and put Browder into place. With Foster as the chairmen of the party but the

main strength was with Browder. Browder had been brought back from China. And it became a very personal struggle. People had to have their guards around them to go through physical violence. Again, the West Coast more so than the East Coast.

[01:02:57] **HOWARD:** Really?

[01:02:57] **MEYER:** Yeah, I think so. That was a very different struggle, but we became very partisan, very limited.

[01:03:04] **HOWARD:** How did that—if it did affect it all—did it affect your trade union movement?

[01:03:08] **MEYER:** Yes. I think it did effect. I was surprised that we became very strong, Foster rights and the supporters of Foster and trade union organizations, more than can be concerned than any cultural organization or other kind of activities that was carried on. And it also, because of that, made us more conscious of the importance of certain basic industries, such as steel, ore, marine waterfront work became the national issue, not just [inaudible] _____. That was the areas that were the greatest effort should be made because they were basic to the country. Because if the [?garden shop?] went on strike that was one thing, but if the steel plant went out on strike it'd have a greater effect. And there was a lot validity to it too.

[01:04:08] **HOWARD:** And so that's where the idea of concentration came from, is that right?

[01:04:12] **MEYER:** That's right. In its respect. So I opened up the possibilities for it and brought about greater [pause] involvement I'll say, I was going to say 'greater growth,' but not necessarily. And the '34 strike came along and it kind of brought forward the fact that you can even have a general strike through that where you can—so Browder's position was very much straight. And Browder also played—fought hard to disband and to change the form of organizations such as the Farm Bureau Federation. I don't know if you know about that. And that was a big step in beginning to work. Again there was resistance to that. Very comfortable being in your own group, you know. Your own cultural background. Browder managed to Americanize the party.

[01:05:12] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me go back now to the waterfront a little bit and ask you how things had changed when you came back to Pedro after the strike in 1935. Were you functioning as an open communist then, or were more closed about your—?

[01:05:26] **MEYER:** I was closed. I was living underground then and I did not necessarily speak to workers all the time as a communist, more as a trade union person was my approach.

[01:05:40] **HOWARD:** Was that your decision? Or was it something that party asked you to do?

[01:05:44] **MEYER:** No, I think it was my decision to use my own means to do it. And maybe it reflected the general conditions of the party union. You didn't go around in Los Angeles and tell people you're a communist because of the amount of Anti-Communist agitation that was going on. And so that—

[01:06:02] **HOWARD:** But you were doing it in '33, right?

[01:06:07] **MEYER:** More so in '33, but then I did it an area of unemployment. A great deal more than it was '33 than in '34 and '35. See, any worker on the job would say, he was a communist, would get fired. You urged him to try to recognize that.

[01:06:26] **HOWARD:** I guess what I'm trying to get at is you seem much more realistic politically, after the '34 strike than before. It's like you learned a lesson. Is that—I don't want to put words in your mouth.

[01:06:39] **MEYER:** No—I'm thinking of what you're saying.

[01:06:43] **HOWARD:** I mean you can get fired on the job by saying you're a communist in '33 and you didn't seem terribly concerned about it then, but in '35 you're more reasonable. You understand people have to put bread on the table, whatever.

[01:06:57] **MEYER:** Well I'll be honest with you, I don't think I gave it much thought at that way at that time, I myself recognized all along that it didn't matter if I told people I'm a communist, the unemployed—there was no job problem [inaudible] _____. On the other hand, if I worked on the job I wasn't telling the other workers I was a communist until I made friends with them and so on and so forth.

[01:07:20] **HOWARD:** What was the party's impact when you came in '33 in San Pedro, especially on the waterfront and among the longshoremen? Did you have a greater impact than before the strike?

[01:07:33] **MEYER:** I think we were more listened to, you know, because we had something to show but you're saying as a result of the longshore workers became more sympathetic. I would question that. I mean I'm not that sure. The IWW—members, and ex-members because it's hard to tell—were more friendly about it because it proved that we were really were doing something. This I found at that time—that there was more respect. That's why I was able to work together to put out the Waterfront Worker as I recall.

I was invited to speak as a communist without saying so at the [inaudible] _____, whatever you call it, made up of a large number of longshoremen and their families. And I spoke in general and about the activities, and the longshoremen showed their respect. The German workers were responding to what was happening to their own workers in their country at that time. It was more—the party was growing and becoming more of a force there. Outside the Soviet Union, the German Communist party was the strongest in the world. And it was a mass party, and in other places it was limited—much greater than France.

[01:08:57] **HOWARD:** Okay, now let see. How—did you remember how many people you might've either recruited among the longshoremen in 1935? You know what let me ask you first, do you remember recruits, perhaps, from among the longshoremen?

[01:09:11] **MEYER:** Very few. I remember two or three. I remember we discussed two or three that we did recruit and I know one of them remained a sympathizer, if not a member of the IWW and also went to join us. That's about the most. And again, my contact in my activity with the seamen was so much more. For one thing—many of them were hungry and I received about 10 or 12 dollars a week and that went to the pot and worked together. And we also worked continuously handing out leaflets, we had a mimeograph machine. So my contact was much more with seamen. And in other words, my—the longshore contact came mostly through The

Waterfront Worker. The Waterfront Worker, as far as I could remember was not a seamen's paper, it was more of a longshore paper.

[01:10:19] **HOWARD:** And what about recruitment among seamen? Do you have any ideas on that?

[01:10:22] **MEYER:** Oh, much more so, but I don't recall—remember. Much, much more so. And I would say the seamen were recruited through seamen party organizers that came through around. There's always someone there who was the head of the Marine Workers Industrial Union also part of the member of the ISU and also a party person, and they were the ones who did the recruiting through the party, among the seamen.

[01:10:48] **HOWARD:** Okay, so the MWIU then was still active among seamen?

[01:10:52] **MEYER:** At the time that I was there.

[01:10:53] **HOWARD:** Were they active among longshoremen?

[01:10:58] **MEYER:** I suppose they had contact with them but it was not—I'm trying to remember. I think a seaman would sit in with us on our waterfront meetings to get out an issue. But as far as they taking on the job of organize or agitate among the longshoremen, I don't recall that they did it directly in an organized matter like I did. I tried to—that was my job at the time.

[01:11:24] **HOWARD:** So you were not a dock worker, you were a full-time functionary?

[01:11:26] **MEYER:** Functionary, yeah.

[01:11:28] **HOWARD:** Okay, and do you have any other impressions that you can recall from the 1935 period? About the waterfront?

I'd ask you questions about the work itself, but I guess you didn't do it.

[01:11:42] **MEYER:** No. I didn't do the work. I recall longshoremen pointing out to me the dangers of it—accidents that could occur, and that occurred and that I was concerned about too. And I did not know how to have any answers for. But often they too didn't know what could be done, and the equipment failed and so on, and didn't know what to do to stop it. Of course, if I could think about it now, I'd recognize and agitate for some kind of bill in the legislature to do the investigations, but we didn't do that. And it was just too bad.

I would say that San Pedro, which was where I was stationed, gave me the feeling that among the small businessmen they were friendly to both the communists and the unions--they mixed the two together--for one thing they made a living off them, so that if they needed a hand-out we could go to some of them and get it from time to time. And [pause] that I didn't feel that San Pedro was as hostile to us as nearly as much as Los Angeles was to us. As such, yeah. In other words, the area had already been initiated to unionism, to struggle and so on, and recognized that we are there for a relatively good purpose, whatever it was you believed in it or not. At Los Angeles there was great anti-communist agitation at the time.

[01:13:19] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me ask you about the impact of the popular front period. I'll ask the question of when it happened exactly—'35 or '36? Did you see the impact of that in '35? The line was beginning to shift in your work in the waterfront?

[01:13:36] **MEYER:** No, I don't recall that we—it was still too new for me to see it and all that we should—no, I don't recall. You see, San Pedro was my major base at the time, my roots were in Los Angeles, proper. And so I also responded to what discussions took place at the district committee of the area and so on. And as I recall, the slogans were raised of anti-war and anti-fascism and so on. But there were some mass meetings held in Los Angeles. But not as far as I know in San Pedro. Even though as I recall, a truckload came in of seamen to the meeting of the—at the Philharmonic Auditorium. That's where a lot of them got broken up by the police. But this was the beginning. But in New York, actually there's other organizations that you can form in the united front, but I don't recall many organizations in Los Angeles area that would form a united front. The Socialist Party was limited. Most of its members were taken over by the communists, I don't know if you know that or not. But as far as a broad-based—like later on in the league—I don't recall that it had been formed yet at that time in Los Angeles.

[01:15:15] **HOWARD:** How about in on the waterfront, in the ILA? The ILA was the union among longshoremen, the national longshoremen's association. And before the strike in 1933, you were arguing that ILA was corrupt and everything like that, it shouldn't be worked with. After 1934, what was your position then? In regards with working within the ILA? Do you remember?

[01:15:41] **MEYER:** After '34, the ILA I don't think existed as such, after the general strike.

[01:15:50] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I think it did.

[01:15:51] **MEYER:** Did it?

[01:15:51] **HOWARD:** For two or three years. The ILA was formed until the CIO arrived.

[01:15:55] **MEYER:** I can't be of help to you within that area because I'm limited in what I can remember. All I know is that the union itself did not seem to be corrupt, I did not take that attitude. It was more of what the ship owners were doing to the workers that seemed to matter.

The longshoremen Local must have been relatively small, in general, compared to San Francisco. And I don't recall any, even any of the leaders being known like they were in San Francisco. I've been talking about ILA leaders. So that there wasn't much agitation on our part against the union, as such.

[01:16:54] **HOWARD:** Do you—okay.

[01:16:55] **MEYER:** That's about all I can remember.

[01:16:55] **HOWARD:** Okay. So you left the waterfront in 1935, then?

[01:16:55] **MEYER:** Yeah, and came to—went to New York.

[01:17:08] **HOWARD:** Okay, why don't you tell me about that then?

[01:17:11] **MEYER:** New York?

[01:17:11] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[01:17:12] **MEYER:** Oh god. You're talking about a whole new ball game. In New York, I joined the Teamsters Union under another name, instead of Meyer Baylin—Michael Baylin, and became deeply involved in the struggle.

[01:17:28] **HOWARD:** Why was it changed to Michael?

[01:17:30] **MEYER:** Because they had already listed as an expelled member in their records. In San Pedro. I was expelled as a communist, and I didn't fight it because I was leading it.

[01:17:40] **HOWARD:** You thought you'd get around it by changing your first name?

[01:17:43] **MEYER:** And it worked! It worked, and I got in. And there I was a part of the leadership of the waterfront, the section of the communist party, which means teamsters, longshoremen and seamen. And among that group, I was with Robertson and a number of other people. And found a very different world in New York, as you would—as you could tell. And they started with a meeting with the five party members who were in the Teamsters Union. Teamsters Union consisted about 25 to 30 locals in New York. And I went into the waterfront local, Local 8 or 7 that did the loading to the docks. The docks were all under control by the racketeers who were taking to getting a shakedown at the time of a freight that was shipped into the—and that was known and accepted at the time, the tribute. Our concern, was again, that the fact that even though the shops were unionized, they employers weren't paying full wages was one of the major issues, I think. And so that was the major issue.

Unemployment wasn't too bad. They shaped up for jobs in the teamsters just the same as they do for longshoremen, and if you needed a certain number of men, they'd take you down for the summertime, the best season you could work. I went to work, a few cases and learned, what the industry was about, it wasn't too difficult. Found good relationship between the teamsters and the longshoremen, and interchanged sometimes—working as a longshoreman, sometimes with the teamsters according to the conditions. Mostly dominated by the Irish and the Italians. But mostly Irish.

[01:20:01] **HOWARD:** Where was this local located in New York? By the waterfront?

[01:20:04] **MEYER:** This was the Chelsea area. And I'm not sure that they did it in other parts too but there was really was in it, but we found a synergy between longshore and the teamsters. We related in the same cause, quite heavy. And so we formed this group of Party members. There were probably two or three others in the same local as the others. And we starting working through fractions in the unions. Which was a bad thing to do.

[01:20:37] **HOWARD:** Why?

[01:20:38] **MEYER:** Because it meant that decisions were being made about union life outside of the union! And brought in there in an organized manner which was found as a negative thing. It was not democratic. The fraction. In other words, you believed the longshoremen was an organization—is this a new concept, the fraction?

[01:21:04] **HOWARD:** No, I know about it.

[01:21:05] **MEYER:** Yeah, okay I just didn't know. So the—we typically show to get good results. We published the paper, I was the editor of it—I think I have a copy of it, one those Times. And the—

[01:21:14] **HOWARD:** Now, I'm sorry, the paper was for the Teamsters?

[01:21:17] **MEYER:** The Teamsters. The Teamsters supported the papers and written by the Teamsters. It was all the bad language that went with it and the misspelling and all of that. It became pretty well. Had copies of about 2,000 to 4,000 copies per month came out, and carries great weight among the Teamsters. Again, I recognized the value of publications. We began to spread out into other locals. There were two other locals who became very popular and had support. We were dealing with Irish-Americans. Catholics, who knew me and few of us as communists, but did not join because of the Catholic beliefs.

[01:22:12] **HOWARD:** Why don't you tell me about that?

[01:22:13] **MEYER:** The Catholic Church played a big role in their lives.

[01:22:20] **HOWARD:** In what way?

[01:22:23] **MEYER:** The Church said, as I'm told, that the Communists were atheists and so on and that was something that was in direct contradiction to as being Catholic. Being a member of the party. And we tried very hard to recruit them. And over a period about four years, we ended up with a 110 party members.

[01:22:48] **HOWARD:** In the waterfront section, or—

[01:22:50] **MEYER:** No. About in the waterfront section there was no more of about 10 party members. Developed even some good leadership amongst them.

[01:23:03] **HOWARD:** What period was this now?

[01:23:05] **MEYER:** 1935 to 1939. That's when the war broke out.

[01:23:08] **HOWARD:** You only recruited ten people?

[01:23:10] **MEYER:** In the waterfront.

[01:23:11] **HOWARD:** In the waterfront section?

[01:23:12] **MEYER:** Yeah. It was not easy. It was not easy.

[01:23:16] **HOWARD:** Even among seamen?

[01:23:17] **MEYER:** No, this is—no, no. I'm talking about Teamsters only.

[01:23:20] **HOWARD:** Oh the longshore—okay. The Teamsters of the waterfront section.

[01:23:25] **MEYER:** Yeah, in New York, the Teamsters activity wasn't only limited to the waterfront area. We recruited ten Teamsters that worked in the longshore area, on the docks.

The others went into many other workers, furniture locals, garden locals and so on. Which was pretty—and mostly Catholic too. We had a meeting that we called together, as Communists and we brought Earl Browder's brother to speak, Bill Browder, to it. I recall it. About 80 showed up. We worked hard for it. Eighty Irish-American Teamsters. And he gave a very nice presentation. Did not recruit a single one. And they said, 'If my pastor or Father knew I was here, they would be very upset.' They gave me the feeling that Catholicism was the main reason that was holding them back. Their religious belief.

[01:24:27] **HOWARD:** Now it's funny, I've heard this before. If you take a country like Italy—heavily Catholic population, and that's never stopped them from supporting the same thing.

[01:24:35] **MEYER:** The same thing in France. But here, it was very strong. The other reason for it is, is that the Catholic church was much more closer [sic] and involved with the people more so than we were. You see, there was always the communions and the baptisms and the parties, and so on. And even greater influence among the women, who did go to church more than the men did. But the very important part, the very important role I think that was it. The other thing is that this movement attracted some Catholic intellectuals who began to study what we were doing to such an extent that they picked up this idea of fractions in the union. Of one organization. They set up their own school—

[01:25:30] **HOWARD:** ACTU [Association of Catholic Trade Unionists] eventually, right?

[01:25:31] **MEYER:** ACTU, ACTU. You know about it. And they in turn showed us how that they can do it too and they did it. We did succeed in supporting very good progressive leaders who overthrew the existing leadership which was very much dominated by the racketeers. This includes Local 8 or 7. I don't know if whether you talked to Sam Madell, but it doesn't matter. And I think that our main work was very successful. We tied up the city, in in a strike, in 1936, right after the war in Spain started [Spanish Civil War] .

[01:26:15] **HOWARD:** Do you have any remembrances about the longshoremen? Who might've been involved in the longshore section?

[01:26:19] **MEYER:** Yes, Sam Madell and one very active one that went off to Spain and was killed, I can't recall his name. Otherwise there wasn't too many that I can remember who were active, but Sam was the major one that I knew.

[01:26:34] **HOWARD:** Did Sam have very good success in recruiting people? Bringing them in?

[01:26:38] **MEYER:** I don't think so, as far as I can remember.

[01:26:42] **HOWARD:** Yeah, he agrees.

[01:26:42] **MEYER:** Yeah, he agreed too?

[01:26:44] **HOWARD:** Yeah, he didn't have much success. Why do you think he didn't have much success?

[01:26:48] **MEYER:** Maybe about the same reason I didn't have much success. Insofar as that—for one thing, when you're involved, for me anyway, joining the party wasn't the most important thing. For the people up in the office, they raised hell. And the party leadership and the fake functionaries they thought the results were, "Well, how many did you recruit?"

I remember this general strike we had with the Teamsters that started in New York. I was called in with the others, and they raised hell and asked, 'Why aren't you recruiting?' We were trying to maintain our momentum of what we're trying to do. So the need for such results was very important to these people, I did not place such importance on it.

[01:27:40] **HOWARD:** What do you remember anything about the degree of terror and violence directed against the rank-and-filers on the docks, especially.

[01:27:48] **MEYER:** Well, we had a number of beatings. Our leader, Harold Gates, was beaten up and a few others were intimidated. But they did not cause him to stay away. I was untouched because I was looked upon as an outsider, as a communist. They didn't know how to deal with me. I feel that's what saved me because they didn't know what would happen. They kind of know what would happen on their own. I knew there was intense intimidation, especially in Local 202 that was the food union's in Washington and Oregon. I don't know if you're familiar with New York or not.

[01:28:27] **HOWARD:** Just a little bit.

[01:28:28] **MEYER:** Anyways and they called me in, the racketeers, and I said, "What do you want?" "How much?" And I told them, "What're you doing?" "This is what I'm doing, I'm trying to get you off," and this confusing to him.

[01:28:41] **HOWARD:** Tell me about that. How did they call you in and how did they identify you?

[01:28:44] **MEYER:** Well, we set up a slate of candidates against them. First-time in fact in 25 years. So we got a hold of some of the people who slated to work there. And one of them told them about me. And what I was doing. So they told them to bring me in and talk things over and they were sure they could straighten me out. So I went. Stupid, I don't think I would do it now! The name stood out among all of them, in the top ranked gangster. So we talked, he was an easy-going guy. Didn't feel frightened about it. Gave him the usual line that I was struggling for the worker's better conditions and so and so, and we find the system's no good. And you know, they listened. They listened. They said that this guy's got dreams, probably. [laughs] Where it was, they said, "How much? Everybody's got a price." And I said, "I don't want any of that 'how much?' business. I'm not interested. I'm not out here for. . ." And they asked me "How much does the Communist Party pay you?" and I said, "They don't pay me. My wife's working—which is the truth—my wife as a social worker. We're getting along fine." Anyway, they—

[END PART THREE/BEGIN PART FOUR]

[LOUD NOISE]

[01:30:04] **HOWARD:** They brought in an attorney?

[01:30:06] **MEYER:** An attorney to show him how to run a campaign. And he put on a very heavy campaign, that the union was doing for them and was able to go out for so on and so he got the help that he needed and he won. Of course they took away some of our candidates, just took them right off of our slate and put them on their slate and were elected to their executive board. Which was an honorary position, on the other hand also whenever you went to a meeting of the executive board, you received a day's pay as a reward of being a member of an executive board of a Teamster's local, which was something that they wanted.

So I myself didn't feel threatened. We had some good people in there. Six years later, Johnny Strong beat this gang and became just as ruthless as the others were. Catholic, backed by the ACTU [Association of Catholic Trade Unionists], I think or whatever they called themselves—the Association. . .—And the struggle goes on. In 807, who brought in this leadership, they destroyed any of the good guys. Two of them went to prison doing some time for taking money from the employers. So there was a mixed bag in it, but we were in it. So that to me, the important thing is that we were considered a part of it, more so.

[01:31:22] **HOWARD:** How long were you in the waterfront section? From '35 to '39?

[01:31:26] **MEYER:** Yes. From about '35 to '39.

[01:31:30] **HOWARD:** Did you come in contact with longshoremen at large meetings? Or was it mostly Teamsters?

[01:31:33] **MEYER:** No, mostly—most the Teamsters. In fact, all of them, and we had about eight or ten meetings a week.

[01:31:40] **HOWARD:** Is that right?

[01:31:41] **MEYER:** Yeah, I had all the other locals were very important locals and had to organize the parcel post service that's now national. The first local was formed in New York, taxi cab drivers were hammering about it, there was a lot of involvement in it. The bakery drivers and so on. So it was a big one. But my main concentration was on the waterfront activity.

[01:32:12] **HOWARD:** Do you remember a publication called The Shape-Up?

[01:32:14] **MEYER:** Sure.

[01:32:15] **HOWARD:** What do you remember about that?

[01:32:17] **MEYER:** Well, I saw that coming up and it related to The Waterfront Worker that we were doing and it was distributed. It was sent out by, it was distributed out often by women party members. Young girls go

out there on the waterfront and the fellows would get into conversations with them. And they encouraged the girls to think that they were interested in becoming close to the party and so on. And the girls would say, "Well, could we see you?" And talk about the job. And he'd say, "Sure." And give them a name and address. And these girls—it would happen a couple of times—these girls would go to the house and sure enough it's the name of someone else entirely from their own. And the wife would question, "What's going on here?" And they were showing up all over the place, they had a good sense of humor about the whole thing.

[01:33:11] **HOWARD:** Why did they send women? Why did the party send women to the waterfront?

[01:33:13] **MEYER:** It seemed that the—I've never stopped to think—I guess it's easier to contact men as women than man to man. I could see—here's the result! I mean there were other results too, you see, but this just made it easier. They also distributed the Daily Worker at the same time. They maintained the regular spot so that the men would get to know them. And it cooled them off. I think they were more acceptable to the men. More confusing that women like that would take the trouble come out there, but they did that.

[01:33:51] **HOWARD:** I know Dell Daly. Do you know the name? Yeah, he said that the reason that they had women distribute literature is because the men were always getting beaten up and they figured that the goons wouldn't beat up women. Now this was among seamen. And then they'd send the women and they'd beat them up anyway.

[01:34:05] **MEYER:** The women?

[01:34:05] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[01:34:06] **MEYER:** Where? In New York?

[01:34:07] **HOWARD:** In New York. Among seamen. And same was true with longshoremen. They would usually send women to distribute that literature also.

[01:34:12] **MEYER:** We didn't have too many incidents as I recall in the waterfront of women being beaten up. Teased—the papers taken away sometimes. But no beating up as I recall, in the three or four years I was involved there.

[01:34:25] **HOWARD:** Okay, well the popular frontline took hold when you were on the New York Waterfront. How did that affect your—

[01:34:31] **MEYER:** Well, it affected in that it was the least success was in that area, because we were dealing again with the Catholics in the Waterfront, who's priest said to stay away from them, from the communist organization, and that it was no good for you. So the least results were there.

Among the locals there, there were more Jewish workers involved so that's why we had much better results. The parties and gatherings and the [American] League Against War and Fascism. Encouraged the big meetings in Madison Square Garden, I don't know if you recall, anyone can tell you about that. It was a very big movement in New York, I would stay off-hand. I can't speak of the Puerto Rican minority at that time, I don't know enough of—but as far as the general feeling in the city it was an accepted movement. It was a mass movement. More so

than anything else that the Party had done up to that time. And among the black people, again, it was limited, I would say. Same as they were limited in number of them that worked in these union jobs. Again, I—more [?response?] for not making an issue on why blacks were not employed on the waterfront. They were cushy job—better paying jobs. You've been told that Joe Ryan, longshoremen put a lot of parolees to work there and guarded his position with their lives, practically, because he had the ability to send them back to prison you any time he wanted to. So that became a big thing for him.

[01:36:15] **HOWARD:** What do you know about that? Back placement of those workers?

[01:36:18] **MEYER:** Well, I just know that—what I indicated to you that they, that he was able to do that. Probably worked with the state and had pretty good control. And they in turned served him. If anything had to be done, he'd be there.

[01:36:31] **HOWARD:** How did the prisoners and ex-convicts conduct themselves on the waterfront?

[01:36:37] **MEYER:** Well, first of all, I didn't know—you can't tell by looking at him. And probably in this case, I'm probably telling more than hearsay from another longshoreman, waterfront workers, than from my own direct experience. You see, because I didn't run into any of them working for the Teamsters. I think maybe they weren't as trusted to driving trucks. So they would be on the waterfront, although there was a lot of pilfering going on the waterfront as you probably know. This is one of the conditions when one of them came over with a brand new suit. Found a new suit for me and I wouldn't take it. And I didn't have to even ask how he'd come about it, it was in the neighborhood in Chelsea—nice white suit. And he laughed, took it back. And I went down to the street and later I found about 15 or 20 of my friends wearing white suits. [laughs] They hawked a whole bunch of them. Radios, T.V.'s and anything—that continuing going on, getting it. It wasn't looked upon, at the time, as a very bad thing to do in anyway. I mentioned that one of the party leaders in he blew a [?sky hole?] , 'it was terrible, it's dishonest.' You know, took a very moralistic attitude. But he can't do that because if he does that he'll do the same thing going into the movement.

[01:38:00] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about relationships between the central party leadership and you as sort of a rank-and-file organizer, a functionary, a low-level functionary. Did you have more economy in making day-to-day decisions than when you were in San Pedro as opposed to New York? Or was it about the same?

[01:38:22] **MEYER:** About the same. The main—I was under central committee, as a member, the same as longshore seamen, because we were concentrating on special work. And what happened—what it generally consisted on was the decision of the National Committee, and the discussion of the National Bureau was brought down to the District Committee where it was worked too and where it was discussed. But in the main, there wasn't any changes taking place much and any decisions from on top. You see, it was scattered out. And what I have to admit was that it didn't bother me very much, except the times when I questioned things, they were annoyed with me and showed it. I felt as if I wasn't as close to them as the others who didn't ask as any questions or didn't rock the boat. But I did.

[01:39:21] **HOWARD:** What sorts of things did you question? Do you remember?

[01:39:23] **MEYER:** Well, like at the time the Soviet-Nazi pact [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,] was signed, many of the party leaders thought that now that we could have a united front with the Germans in Yorkville [New York] . That shook the hell out of me! There was these Nazis there and they were going to talk now about working with them. And they were serious [about it] and I questioned them. And this was a terrible blow to me, and there were other instances. Not as shocking as this one but—

[01:39:48] **HOWARD:** What you're actually suggesting is that they were actually working with Nazis?

[01:39:51] **MEYER:** That's the feeling that I had at the time. They had some political organizations in Yorkville where the German population was concentrated.

[01:39:58] **HOWARD:** Where was that? Outside?

[01:39:59] **MEYER:** No, it's around—between Thirty-fourth and Eighty-fifth street on the East Side. That's where Yorkville is. In New York. I mean Hank Ford was the person—one of the county-organizer—party leaders.

[01:40:13] **HOWARD:** What did he say exactly? Do you remember?

[01:40:15] **MEYER:** Well, that the with the new position-changing done, the possibility of advancing the movement through the united front there.

[01:40:24] **OUTSIDE:** How you guys doing?

[01:40:24] **HOWARD:** Good! This guy is a wealth of information!

[01:40:32] **OUTSIDE:** [laughs]

[01:40:32] **MEYER:** Trying to see how he characterized it—something about working together through an electoral politics I'd say.

[01:40:38] **HOWARD:** Did he actually mention the Nazis themselves?

[01:40:40] **MEYER:** No, no. He did not say any specific organization, just that we could work with the chairmen organizations. Which were very definitely Nazi ideas, as I recall.

[01:40:53] **HOWARD:** And then what did you say?

[01:40:54] **MEYER:** Well I said, 'How can that be?' and so on. And I implied that I was narrow and didn't understand the forces at work. I was being picky about it and so on. I mean, there were a lot of things, it's not easy. This is about the extreme one as I recall. Other cases where I would present some program that would not fully be in line with the national program was and to try something and I would be knocked down, and they said, 'you just state what you're told to do,' to that effect, 'don't come here with—“

[01:41:28] **HOWARD:** Did the workers ever ask you about the Nazi-Soviet—?

[01:41:31] **MEYER:** No, I don't recall that—I worked with people who were Nazi-minded Teamsters. Oh yeah, they said so. Anti-Jews—knowing I was a Jew. In New York, it's that way.

[01:41:47] **HOWARD:** What can you tell me of the ILA of that period? How would you characterize that union?

[01:41:51] **MEYER:** Very strong, organized gangster-controlled—Joe Ryan controlled-organization, with very little concern with what we were doing as far as I could tell. We were not a threat as far as they were concerned.

[01:42:06] **HOWARD:** Although Ryan always dragged out the anti-communist crusade every time that he could.

[01:42:15] **MEYER:** Yeah, not—we knew that he was anti-communist. I don't think he made a big thing out of—they were almost [pause] an organization—that like the rest of the AFL—very smug and the feeling that they got job control and that helped very much and they did not get involved politically, too much in such an area. And if you came to the lecture saw the—you see what would happen there but in general, I don't think he cared on the campaign. Even to the extent that he chaired a meeting with the freedom to free Tom Mooney in New York.

[01:42:51] **HOWARD:** He chaired a meeting? I didn't know that.

[01:42:52] **MEYER:** Yeah, it was big important meeting it turned out. And a big turnout for it. And then he gets up and says, “Even if Tom Mooney is guilty, he served long enough, he ought to be pardoned.” And he sensed—he was smart enough to sense that the new force was coming along and that he shouldn't stay behind entirely. That Mike Quill for the Transport Workers Union [of America] was the outstanding, but there were other unions who were coming along. Van Arsdale [Harry Van Arsdale, Jr.] of the Local 3 of the electrical workers' union [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] was coming to them. So I'm not basing that there was enough pressure for him to do it. Of course to him, Tom Mooney was basically a communist.

[01:43:39] **HOWARD:** So you don't think Ryan was particularly concerned about at all the Party, you mean?

[01:43:48] **MEYER:** I don't think so.

[01:43:48] **HOWARD:** And why do you think he was able to stay in power as long as he was? Ryan?

[01:43:51] **MEYER:** There was very strong gangster control set-up. You know, it related to the mafia, to the number rackets and to everything else that went in defending all of that is part of it. The men, in comparison to other trades, were getting fairly decent pay. The only thing was that it wasn't regular—the shape-up as you probably know. But there was plenty of other workers anxious to get in there. Under his condition, they couldn't get in. In fact, I could see a very strong sheen from that still lives in that area as you know.

[01:44:27] **HOWARD:** So you think the workers were basically cowed? Or intimidated?

[01:44:33] **MEYER:** I would say that the workers—in the union itself?

[01:44:36] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[01:44:37] **MEYER:** No, I wouldn't say that. I think they knew their position and we accepted it. And did not feel particularly oppressed since the certain strong minority, if not majority of them, were getting pretty steady work. I would say.

[01:44:57] **HOWARD:** I know about that, by the way. They had a thing called, regular gangs on the New York waterfront. And as I—well what were they, as you recall?

[01:45:07] **MEYER:** As I understand is when there was need to load-unload on the ship, a regular gang would come in if there were any that couldn't make it that day and he would be replaced in the shape-up. Then, if they needed extra workers, they would take out of that and he would favor those—the foremen would favor those he knew and give them a day's work and in many cases he'd give them a pay off in some kind. I can't say for sure that they required a payoff from these extra guys regularly, I don't know, but they were given certain favors by these working guys so that—and that hope is always that they become part of the regular gang. Either someone was killed or that they would die and they would get into it.

[01:45:57] **HOWARD:** Two questions about the regular gang. First of all, what proportion of the longshoremen were hired in the regular gangs? Do you have any idea?

[01:46:04] **MEYER:** I went to watch the shape-up and I would say at that time, they worked around, and I would say out of the maybe 50 that was around—the regular work gang did not show up to the shape-up.

[01:46:18] **HOWARD:** Oh they don't?

[01:46:20] **MEYER:** No. They were notified in other ways—that they were going to work. The ones that appeared at the shape-up were the ones that want work, who haven't got work. So you would point out, "You, you, you, you" would be your consolations. And you would come out on the ship, and rest of them would walk away.

[01:46:36] **HOWARD:** Okay then. How do you think the regular gangs were called up to work?

[01:46:44] **MEYER:** I don't know, but there should be no problem. Either a phone call or a neighbor would come in or they were told when they were left a job, about the time, 'during the week such-and-such a ship would come and then you'll be working.' I don't think that would be much of a problem. But you see at the shape-up the guys didn't have no work—they knew ships were coming! But the possibility of—

[01:47:09] **HOWARD:** All right here's a question. What proportion of the guys who worked on the docks in the New York, in the area that you were in Chelsea at least, belonged to regular gangs? And what proportion were also called extra men and were a part of the shape-up?

[01:47:22] **MEYER:** Well, my only way to judge that is by the fact that in the period of about six weeks, Bridges outfit was able to get about 10,000 signatures on the waterfront. For to, to join—to form the longshore union, which they did, but so that means there were that many. And probably, and this is of course, again

guessing, probably for everyone that had a regular job, there was one that was not working, and who would've really liked to work as a longshoreman.

[01:47:57] **HOWARD:** So you think it might be 50 percent regular, 50 percent extras?

[01:48:03] **MEYER:** Wait a minute, 50 percent regular, but that they would not employ 50 percent extra to work on. In other words, they made a gang four gangs of ten each—40 men, they may need to supplement it with five or six more from the shape-up.

[01:48:20] **HOWARD:** Five or six more men?

[01:48:21] **MEYER:** Men. You see? You follow me? So the rest wouldn't have any work. Some of them would get work one day—

[01:48:28] **HOWARD:** Okay, so among the working longshoremen, the vast majority were regular gangs.

[01:48:33] **MEYER:** Or at least 50 percent were of the—were regulars. What I'm trying to say is, that there was a need for 100 men. Ninety of those men would be regulars. Then the other 10 percent would be drawn from a pool of another 100 men who had no jobs, you follow me?

[01:48:57] **HOWARD:** Okay, so the other 10 percent are from extras? So there might be another 100 of those, right?

[01:49:02] **MEYER:** Yeah, because I saw a great number of them on the waterfront.

[01:49:07] **HOWARD:** Okay so then, among the men who worked fairly regularly on the waterfront, the vast majority would be members of regular gangs, is that right?

[01:49:17] **MEYER:** That would be my—those who would work regularly, yeah.

[01:49:20] **HOWARD:** Now that's true on Chelsea at least, where you're familiar with. And do you think it was any different—

[01:49:22] **MEYER:** I don't know about San Pedro or anywhere else. That's the only one I can tell you.

[01:49:27] **HOWARD:** So, then we're talking the vast majority of regular—of working regularly working longshoremen belonged to regular gangs. How did you become a member of a regular gang? Do you know?

[01:49:41] **MEYER:** I think they gave preference to the sons that were coming along and to close relatives. I know that happened in the Teamsters and I think it would very similar there. And also political pull. Some politician wanted someone that it is important to him to get a job and they'd be able to get it.

[01:50:11] **HOWARD:** Was it considered a plum to get it as longshoremen?

[01:50:14] **MEYER:** As far as I can remember it was.

[01:50:17] **HOWARD:** Provided you were a regular gang?

[01:50:18] **MEYER:** Regular member, yeah. Otherwise it was miserable. You never knew whether you were working or not. Standing out in the cold for hours, waiting for the—

[01:50:28] **HOWARD:** Okay, that's interesting because that's something I want to explore a little more, regular gang membership.

[01:50:35] **MEYER:** New York teamsters, longshoremen, those who worked with [them] —seamen was a different ballgame, really—were very provincial, very limited. When we met them, some of them never saw a state show, we took them to see the One-Third of a Nation [play on housing slums in New York City] and they were excited, I mean to see their lives portrayed there. They did not know they were within 10 blocks of Time Square or 15 blocks—Chelsea's quite close in that area. And we opened up these [things] a lot of them. They saw foreign movies for the first time and things like that. And in turn Vera and I went to a lot of services in the Church. Got to know some of them, priests. Had political conversations with them, tried to influence them with the Spanish Civil War, didn't get any place at all with them. Very fearful. Followed orders very closely. But very nice people. We enjoyed being with them. We had parties together. We drank together. And if I could have been left alone I'd be quite happy in that atmosphere. Despite it being a relatively low intellectual level. There were individuals who were illiterate, couldn't read or write, but they were capable men.

[01:51:58] **HOWARD:** And how would you characterize them politically? If they held political views?

[01:52:02] **MEYER:** Quite, quite cynical. Quite knowledgeable. Kind of—I think they reflect their religions in some ways. Cut through, they cut through ideas really quickly. They don't go into long developments of it. And if their sense tells them that something is right, they follow through. For instance, we tried to get them to vote Browder for president, and they'd laugh about it and so on and so forth.

[01:52:30] **HOWARD:** Why would they laugh?

[01:52:30] **MEYER:** They didn't think that it was a serious suggestion and they were right. They didn't understand the other reasons for Browder running to publicize the program. Most of them think that if you want to run for office you want to be elected—they're very simplistic in that way.

[01:52:53] **HOWARD:** Yeah. So it wasn't so much political rejection for a candidate, say, as just being practical?

[01:53:01] **MEYER:** Yes. I mean they're might be some that hide their feelings about communists but would work with me for other things that were important to them. But otherwise, I think that much of the workers were uniform in rejection even individual, far closer to their position is because it's impractical. Like Jesse Jackson. He's got hurt one day and I tried to explain to them, I'm not going to draw votes away from [?my candidate?] and they think that in very simple terms. And it's not an easy—there's no simple answer to the situation. Are you active at all politically?

[01:53:44] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I'm in CISPES? Committee of Solidarity for the People of El Salvador. I'm pretty active in it in UCLA.

[01:53:50] **MEYER:** Yeah, we went to the gathering in Berkley [California] .

[01:53:54] **HOWARD:** Now it's a tough question, we haven't resolved them or anything. It's a recurring problem. How you get people involved that are reformist level and get them to move consciously to the Left.

[01:54:05] **MEYER:** Very difficult. Very difficult. And they need that dominion for those very simple solution. People have to grow to that position. My main [tapping] argument is, I've seen great growth among the people in the 50 years that I've been involved in spite of it. In fact, it seems that things are sort of the same but they're not. And secondly, it's a thing people go through that they're not told by somebody else. And reading a book is something like that. You have to begin to see it in their own way. And that's a hard thing.

[01:54:45] **HOWARD:** By getting involved and changing the world, I think that's what happens right? And overcoming the cynicism by getting politically involved, it's so important, even at a limited level.

[01:54:55] **MEYER:** That's right. Are we on tape?

[01:54:58] **HOWARD:** Yeah, we are.

[01:55:00] **MEYER:** I'll quote you.

[01:55:05] **HOWARD:** All right, so in 1939 you said that you—did you leave the waterfront at that time?

[01:55:09] **MEYER:** Yeah.

[01:55:10] **HOWARD:** And where did you head off then?

[01:55:12] **MEYER:** Well I went back to my original work in Electrical— [AUDIO CUTS OFF]

[01:55:17] **HOWARD:** Why don't we talk a little bit about the question of 'born from within'? And the characterization of the AFL and the social fascists and things like that. What can you tell me about that?

[01:55:34] **MEYER:** It was not the AFL that was labelled as Social Fascists, it was more of the socialist movement and was represented in this state by Upton Sinclair, the outstanding socialist and he ran for governor as you know. And he was labelled by the Party in New York as being a social fascist that we should oppose his election.

Now Sam Darcy comes into that room, and he is the district organizer, and the Party said that the decision was [?phony?] the decision. And I was struck by that. That here's the leader of the Party, able to say that much. And together with that he moved forward with openness by urging the left-wing groups in the TUEL—that's including the marine workers—of going in back to the AFL and working with the AFL and was a major organization. This took place even before the CIO was organizing. The CIO started organizing in '36, in the auto workers' union. So he saw that very clearly, and handled it in his way and never carried on his politics in his meetings, just in talking with us. And that I think it was very helpful because he—when decisions were made to go into the AFL it came much easier because he had prepared the way especially among some of the Party leaders at that time.

[01:57:17] **HOWARD:** What kind of arguments did he raise with you? Did he ever talk about ‘born from within’? Use that term?

[01:57:22] **MEYER:** No! No he didn't think—didn't talk in terms of that. He talked in terms of, I would call legitimizing our positions as workers. And that we should become a part of the scene and even though we were communist, we really shouldn't be in such a position where we were ostracized and separated. This was his main discussion and he was quite capable in that respect, in presenting such a line in public statements that he made, as I recall. And yet he did not seem to be in opposition to the national Party leadership. The main ones that pushed this line was, I recall [pause] Bill Foster. I'm not sure how far—I know Browder did for sure. Pushed his line for going into the AFL, I'm not sure how heavy Foster went into it because he himself tended to be sectarian in respect.

[01:58:36] **HOWARD:** What was your own reaction to when Darcy suggested this?

[01:58:41] **MEYER:** I found it very uplifting, very good. Between that and the fact that he was saying these things even before it was the Party line. I didn't know that—didn't know how that would be felt because you know he was removed later on. From California.

[01:59:05] **HOWARD:** When do you remember him saying this?

[01:59:07] **MEYER:** About 1933 or so. So that early. I remember a trip that we made together from Los Angeles to San Francisco. But we had a chance to talk about it. And I threw remarks at him and he was—not annoyed with me, but he indicated that I wasn't wise and that I didn't know fully about what the situation was.

[01:59:31] **HOWARD:** Do you remember when that was in ‘33? What month, by any chance?

[01:59:34] **MEYER:** Well, if I'm not mistaken it was toward the fall. I remember [I was wearing] warmer clothes, but the exact date I could not recall. I mean I couldn't tell you. It was toward the fall. I was driving and I nearly wiped out the whole leadership, by side-swiping my car. I remember it.

[01:59:58] **HOWARD:** Okay, that's good—I wanted that.

[END PART FOUR]